

REMARKS

Claims 1-18 are pending in this application.

The undersigned thanks the Examiner for the phone interview of June 26, 2006. An agreement was reached between the Examiner and the undersigned that U.S. Patent No. 6,695,827 (Chen et al.) does not disclose an absorbent structure being secured to at least one of the outer cover and the bodyside line within a securement zone wherein a central portion of the securement zone at a central region of the article has an average width that is greater than an average width of an outer portion of the securement zone at a location longitudinally outward of the central portion of the securement zone as recited in claim 1.

The following remarks are responsive to the Office action dated April 5, 2006.

Response to Rejection of Claims

Claim 1

Claim 1 is directed to an absorbent article having a longitudinal axis, a lateral axis, opposite longitudinal end regions and a central region extending longitudinally between and interconnecting the end regions. The absorbent article comprises:

an outer cover;

a bodyside liner adapted for contiguous relationship with the wearer's skin; and

an absorbent structure disposed between the bodyside liner and the outer cover, the absorbent structure being secured to at least one of the liner and the outer cover within a securement zone, the securement zone comprising a central

portion disposed generally within the central region of the article and having an average width as determined by a Securement Zone Measurement Method, and at least one outer portion disposed longitudinally outward of the central portion of the securement zone and having an average width as determined by the Securement Zone Measurement Method, said average width of the central portion of the securement zone being substantially greater than said average width of the at least one outer portion of said securement zone.

As set forth in the present application, the term "securement zone" refers to a bounded area within which the absorbent structure is secured to the outer cover and/or the bodyside liner. See paragraph [0067]. That is, the securement zone is defined by the area over which the absorbent structure is secured to the outer cover and/or the bodyside liner, irrespective of the size of the absorbent structure relative to the outer cover and the liner. The essence of claim 1 is that the absorbent structure is secured to the outer cover and/or the bodyside liner within a central portion of the securement zone at the central region of the article and is also secured to the outer cover and/or bodyside liner within at least one outer portion of the securement zone longitudinally outward of the central portion of the securement zone. The average width of the central portion of the securement zone is greater than the average width of the at least one outer portion of the securement zone. As a result, a lesser amount of the outer cover and/or liner at the front and back regions of the article are bound by securement of the absorbent structure thereto against lateral (i.e., widthwise) stretching to allow a better fit of the article on its wearer.

Claim 1 is submitted to be non-obvious and patentable over the references of record, and in particular U.S. Patent No. 6,695,827 (Chen et al.) in that whether considered alone or in combination the references fail to disclose or otherwise suggest an absorbent article in which the absorbent structure is secured to at least one of the outer cover and the bodyside line within a securement zone wherein a central portion of the securement zone at a central region of the article has an average width that is greater than an average width of an outer portion of the securement zone at a location longitudinally outward of the central portion of the securement zone.

Chen et al. disclose an absorbent article that is intended to have good body fit under dynamic conditions. With particular reference to the embodiment of Figs. 4, 5 and 9 of Chen et al., as relied upon by the Office, the absorbent article is a sanitary napkin 70 having a topsheet 85 (Fig. 5), a backsheet 82, and an outer absorbent member 74 therebetween and split longitudinally into two zones. A central absorbent member 78 is disposed between the two zones defined by the split outer absorbent member. A wicking barrier 71 has a vertical component 73 (Fig. 5), a horizontal component 73, and an underlying portion 75 beneath the central absorbent member 78. The central absorbent member 78 has a central shaping line 77 (depicted as a longitudinally extending slit, but could be a crease) so that the absorbent member 78 is deformed (e.g., folded or bent) upon being laterally compressed as illustrated in Fig. 9.

With reference to Fig. 9, a portion of the upper layer of absorbent material is attached to the backsheet at longitudinally spaced attachment points 91 to enhance

longitudinal curl of the absorbent member "outside of the crotch region." See column 21, lines 48-52. That is, the attachment points 91 are disposed in the front region 97 or the back region 99 near, but not within the V-shaped elevated region of the central absorbent member 78. Column 21, lines 53-58. During the above-referenced telephone interview, the Examiner duly noted that Fig. 2 and column 19, lines 36-62 disclose similar attachment points 44.

Chen et al. fail to disclose or otherwise even suggest that the central absorbent member 78 (or the split outer absorbent member) is secured to the backsheet and/or the topsheet within a securement zone that has a central portion disposed within the central region of the article and has an average width that is greater than an average width of an outer portion of the securement zone longitudinally outward of the central portion of the securement zone. In fact, ***the absorbent member 78 of Chen et al. is not even adhered to the backsheet and/or the topsheet within the central or crotch region 92*** of the article. Rather, as is expressly disclosed by Chen et al., the attachment points 91 are disposed only in the front and back regions 97, 99 of the article and there is no securement of the absorbent member 78 to the backsheet or topsheet in the central or crotch region 92. Column 21, lines 53-58. Indeed, if the central absorbent member 78 were attached to the backsheet at the crotch region 92 of the article the absorbent member 78 would not be able to bend into the V-shape illustrated in Fig. 9 of Chen et al. There is also no disclosure found anywhere in Chen et al. that the central absorbent member 78 may be secured to the topsheet.

While applicants and the Examiner disagreed on the above point, it was agreed that the attachment points 91 illustrated in Fig. 9 of Chen et al. (and attachment points 44 of Fig. 2) are of a uniform shape and size and there is no disclosure to the contrary in Chen et al. Thus, even if the attachment points could be characterized as defining a securement zone having a central portion within the crotch region of the article of Chen et al. (and applicants submit that it cannot be characterized as such), such a securement zone would be of a uniform width along its length. That is, such a securement zone would not have a central portion that has an average width greater than an average width of an outer portion of the securement zone longitudinally outward of the central portion of the securement zone as recited in claim 1.

For the above reasons, claim 1 is submitted to be patentable over Chen et al. and the other references of record.

Claims 2-18 depend directly or indirectly from claim 1 and are therefore submitted to be patentable over the references of record for the same reasons as claim 1.

Claim 8

Claim 8 depends from claim 1 and further recites that the securement zone comprises a pair of outer portions extending longitudinally outward of the central portion of said securement zone, one of said outer portions extending longitudinally toward one end of the absorbent article, the other outer portion extending longitudinally toward the opposite end of the absorbent article. Chen et al. clearly fail to disclose such a securement zone. Indeed, there is no

securement of the absorbent 78 to the backsheet longitudinally outward of attachment points 91.

For these additional reasons, claim 8 is further submitted to be patentable over the references of record including Chen et al.

Claim 17

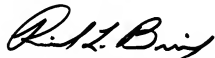
Claim 17 depends directly from claim 1 and further recites that the securement zone extends continuously generally from within one end region of said article through the central region to within the opposite end region of said article. Because the only securement of the absorbent member 78 of Chen et al. to the backsheet and/or topsheet is at the longitudinally spaced attachment points 91, Chen et al. cannot have a securement zone that extends continuously from the front region through the central region into the back region.

For these additional reasons, claim 17 is further submitted to be patentable over the references of record.

CONCLUSION

In view of the above, applicants respectfully request reconsideration and allowance of claims 1-18.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. L. Bridge". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Richard" and last name "Bridge" clearly distinguishable.

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